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TAGS: PREL PGOV EUN CU UK

SUBJECT: HMG HAS RAISED CONCERNS WITH EU COMMISSIONER
MICHEL OVER HIS CUBA VISIT

REF: STATE 20108

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Maura Connolly for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) HMG agrees the upcoming visit of EU Commissioner Louis Michel to Cuba is "not the smartest timing," and has raised directly with Michel the importance of underscoring the EU's dual-track policy, including meeting with civil society, during the visit, according to Foreign Office EU Correspondent Martin Shearman. In response to ref demarche, Shearman told Poloff that although HMG could not stop an EU Commissioner's trip, the UKEU Mission had raised with Michel HMG concerns that he "stay on message" and underscore the EU's dual-track policy during his visit. The UK had also pressed Michel to meet with civil society representatives. Shearman said that although the British had not specifically pressed Michel to meet with the families of political prisoners, London had emphasized the need for Michel to raise human rights concerns in his meetings with Cuban officials.

¶2. (C) Shearman said Michel had assured UKEU colleagues he understood the need to emphasize the dual-track approach and that he would raise human rights concerns while in Cuba. Michel defended the timing of his visit to the British, noting that it was important for an EU official to visit now in order to "gauge the early thinking" of the Cuban leadership post-Fidel, a defense that Shearman called "rather self-justifying."

¶3. (C) Shearman stressed to Poloff that, Michel's visit aside, the UK was looking forward to new EU thinking and action on Cuba with Fidel's departure. The UK very much wants the EU to act in coordination with the U.S. Government on Cuba over coming months.

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